

Abstract

Managing census cancellation and deferral: Recent experience from New Zealand

(New Zealand)

On 22 February 2011 a major earthquake devastated Christchurch, New Zealand's second largest city. The quake occurred only fifteen days before census day (8 March 2011) and when 25% of forms had already been delivered to households. The census was called off by the Government Statistician and Minister of Statistics on 25 February. This paper describes how Statistics New Zealand managed the decision to call off the census, the premature wind-up of census operations, and the process of establishing a date for the next census, which will now be held on 5 March 2013.

The experience has highlighted the importance of having effective crisis management practices in place ahead of census day. The event also highlighted the importance of having the capability to communicate effectively with all affected parties in a coordinated and timely manner. Another key element was the department's relationships with central government agencies. The paper covers these factors and the main lessons learned, and how they have influenced preparations for the 2013 Census and Statistics New Zealand's strategy for transforming the census into the future.